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Family History

ROOTS OF A LIFE: FAMILY, HERITAGE, AND THE MAKING OF MARCEL RAY DURIEZ

Marcel Ray Duriez 8 min read · 4 days ago

My story begins before I was born. It begins with the people, places, work, sacrifices, traditions, and experiences that came before me. To understand where I come from is to understand more than a list of names and dates. It is to understand a family connected to Pennsylvania's coal-country communities, to French and English ancestry, to military service, education, hard work, and the small towns of Northern Cambria that shaped generations of my family. My own story is part of that continuing history.

I was born in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, and raised in Northern Cambria. Northern Cambria is not simply a location on a map to me. It represents the environment in which my understanding of family, community, work, education, creativity, and identity developed. The area includes communities

whose histories reach back through generations, including Barnesboro, Alverda, Heilwood, Patton, and surrounding parts of Cambria County and Indiana County. These communities were shaped by families who worked, raised children, served their country, attended local schools, and built lives in circumstances that were often demanding but deeply connected to place.

My family history reaches back into France through my great-grandfather, **Raymond Duriez**, who was born in France in 1900. According to the family history passed down to me, he came to Pennsylvania in 1917 and settled in the Patton area. His story represents one of the important transitions in my ancestry: a movement from Europe to Pennsylvania and, ultimately, into the communities that became the foundation of later generations of my family. The Duriez name therefore carries a French connection, but my family's American history became closely associated with Pennsylvania and the communities of Cambria County.

My great-grandmother was **Wilda Morgan**, born in 1898. She was known within the family as **Nettie**, and the family tradition identifies her as having English ancestry. Her family eventually became connected with the Alverda area. Together, Raymond and Wilda represent two important ancestral lines in my background: French ancestry through Raymond and English ancestry through Wilda. Their lives became part of the larger history of Pennsylvania families who established themselves in communities shaped by industry, immigration, family, and work.

Their son, my grandfather, was **Raymond Duriez Jr.**, born in 1921. Within the family he was known as **Bud**. His life provides one of the clearest examples of the connection between education, military service, labor, and family responsibility that runs through my roots.

Raymond Jr. attended **Heilwood High School** in Heilwood, Pennsylvania, and the family record identifies him as graduating in **1939**. Heilwood itself is an important part of the historical landscape of the region. Its schools served generations of children in a community connected with the development of the surrounding coal country. The school history is therefore more than an educational footnote. It places my grandfather within the local history of the region in which my family lived.

After his education, Raymond Jr.'s life included military service during World War II. He served as a **sergeant**, and family records describe approximately six years of military service. His military identity remains visible through his grave and veterans' documentation. He is buried at **North End Cemetery** with my grandmother, and his military service is part of the public and family record of his life.

But military service was only one part of my grandfather's story. He also spent decades working in the coal industry. The family history records approximately **42 years of work in the mines**, including work as a **continuous miner** associated with Barnes and Tucker Coal Company and the Sterling area near Bakerton and Alverda. That occupational history is significant because coal mining was not simply an occupation in this part of Pennsylvania. It was part of the economic and cultural identity of entire communities.

The image of my grandfather's life therefore contains several elements at once: a young man educated in the local school system, a World War II serviceman, a husband and father, and a coal miner who spent decades underground. His story represents a generation whose lives were frequently defined by responsibility and endurance.

My grandmother was **Joy M. Duriez**, born in **November 1933** and deceased **October 21, 2021**. She is buried with Raymond Jr. at North End Cemetery. Joy graduated from **Barnesboro High School in 1951**, the same year in which she married. Her parents were **Margaret and Murray Ansley**. Through Joy, my family history therefore connects the Duriez line with the **Ansley family** and with the long history of Barnesboro.

Barnesboro is especially important to my personal heritage because it was not simply a place where relatives happened to live. It was a community in which generations of my family were educated, employed, married, raised children, and ultimately laid to rest. The name Barnesboro itself belongs to the historical identity of the region and remains an important part of understanding my family's roots.

The family continued through Raymond Jr. and Joy to their children, including my father, **Raymond A. J. Duriez**, who was known as **Buddy**. This distinction is important within our family history. My grandfather was **Bud**, while my father was **Buddy**. I was given the name **Marcel**, and I continue to use my given name.

The progression from Raymond Duriez Sr. to Raymond Duriez Jr. to my father represents a direct three-generation Duriez line. It is one of the simplest ways to understand the continuity of the family: a man born in France in 1900; his son, born in Pennsylvania in 1921; and the next generation born into the same broader Pennsylvania family tradition.

The extended family adds still more dimensions to this history. Raymond Jr.'s siblings included **Mildred, Anais, Lucille, Ron, Howard Paul — known as "Howdy" — and William Paul, known as "Bill,"** among others as family records are further clarified. Some names and details within the extended

family still require documentary verification, and that distinction matters to me. Family history should preserve memories while also making clear which details have been independently documented and which come from family recollection.

William Paul "Bill" Duriez was born in **1925** and married **Catherine**, also known as Kate, whose family history places her birth in **1923.** These details form part of the extended family record and help establish the network of aunts, uncles, cousins, and relatives surrounding my grandfather's generation.

That distinction between documented history and family memory is important because this is not intended to be a fictionalized family legend. It is an effort to construct a public documentary history while honoring the people whose lives made the present possible.

My own education eventually brought me through the same regional educational tradition. I graduated from **Northern Cambria High School in 2009.** In that sense, there is a direct educational connection between generations of my family. My grandfather attended Heilwood High School in an earlier era; my grandmother graduated from Barnesboro High School in 1951; and I graduated from Northern Cambria High School in 2009.

The names of the schools changed, communities changed, and the world changed, but education remained part of the family story.

That continuity matters to me because my life eventually moved strongly toward education, writing, art, music, and interdisciplinary study. My family's history did not determine what I would become, but it provided the environment from which I emerged. The coal miner's grandson became an author, composer, artist, educator, and independent researcher. The military service of an earlier generation became part of a broader understanding of responsibility and perseverance. The immigrant experience of my great-grandfather became part of an appreciation for ancestry and identity. The local schools of my grandparents' generation became part of my own educational journey.

My heritage is therefore not a single nationality, occupation, or place. It is a combination of influences.

There is the **French Duriez heritage**, represented in the family history of Raymond Duriez Sr. There is the **English Morgan connection**, represented through Wilda "Nettie" Morgan. There is the **Ansley family**, represented through my grandmother Joy and her parents, Margaret and Murray Ansley. There is the Pennsylvania experience itself: Patton, Alverda, Heilwood, Barnesboro, Bakerton, Northern Cambria, and the surrounding communities.

There is also the heritage of work.

My grandfather's decades in the coal mines are important because they remind me that family history is not only about famous accomplishments. Most families are built by ordinary people doing difficult things for a very long time. A person who spends decades underground working in a coal mine may never appear in a textbook, yet that person's labor can provide the foundation upon which children and grandchildren eventually build entirely different lives.

There is the heritage of service as well. My grandfather's World War II service as a sergeant is part of the historical record of our family. His military service and his mining career represent two different forms of responsibility: service to country and service to family through labor.

There is also the heritage of place.

Northern Cambria taught me that a small community can contain a surprisingly large history. The names on cemetery stones, the names of schools, the old industrial sites, family homes, churches, businesses, and roads can become pieces of a much larger story. To someone passing through, these places may appear ordinary. To a family whose history is embedded there, they are evidence of generations.

That is why preserving this history matters.

I do not want my family's story to become merely a collection of dates. I want the dates to provide structure while the human story provides meaning. Raymond Duriez Sr. was not simply a man born in France in 1900. He was someone who crossed an ocean and established a life in Pennsylvania. Raymond Duriez Jr. was not simply a name on a military record or cemetery marker. He was a son, husband, father, soldier, and coal miner. Joy Duriez

was not simply a name beside his on a cemetery stone. She was a woman educated in Barnesboro, married in 1951, and part of the family history that continued into another generation.

And I am not separate from that history.

I am the next chapter.

My work in literature, music, art, education, and independent research represents my own direction, but it exists within a much older human story. The subjects I return to — identity, memory, adversity, relationships, responsibility, transformation, education, and the search for meaning — are not disconnected from the world in which I was raised.

Perhaps that is the deepest meaning of heritage.

Heritage is not simply what we inherit. It is what we understand, preserve, transform, and pass forward.

My family's past includes an immigrant from France, an English-connected family line, Pennsylvania coal communities, military service, mine work, local schools, marriages, children, and generations of people whose lives were rooted in Northern Cambria. My present includes writing, publishing, music, art, education, research, and an effort to preserve the documentary record of the life I have built.

The connection between those two things is not that I am identical to the generations before me. It is that I am part of the same continuing human story.

To honor the past with the present is not to live in the past. It is to remember where we came from while continuing to build what comes next.

That is my story: a story that began before me, passed through France and Pennsylvania, through Patton, Alverda, Heilwood, Barnesboro, and Northern Cambria, through classrooms, military service, coal mines, family homes, marriages, cemeteries, and generations of ordinary lives — and eventually arrived at me.

And now, through the preservation of that history, I have the opportunity to carry it forward.

Family History +

Written by Marcel Ray Duriez

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